

conversation, it was evident to them that the men were about ready to make use of the boat.

"We're sunk," Sally whispered fearfully. "Maybe we ought to climb out of here and make a dash for it."

Penny offered a better idea. "Why not untie the rope, and let the boat drift off?" she proposed. "The current is swift and should carry us downstream fairly fast."

"Any other boat around that they can use to follow us in?"

"I don't see any." Penny raised the sail a little higher as she gazed along the pier and nearby beach.

"All right, then do your stuff," Sally urged.

While she held the sail slightly above Penny's head so that no movement would be discernible to those on the house steps, the latter reached her hands from beneath the cloth and swiftly untied the rope. The boat began to drift away. Covered by the sail, the girls lay motionless and flat on the craft's bottom.

At first nothing happened. But as they began to hope that the men would not notice the drifting boat, they heard an explosive shout.

"Look!" Claude Harper exclaimed. "Our boat!"

"Jumpin' fish hooks!" Sweeper Joe muttered. "How did that happen? I tied 'er secure."

"It looks like it," the other retorted sarcastically. "I can't afford to lose that boat."

The girls could hear running footsteps on the pier and boardwalk near the dance pavilion. Sally dared to peep from beneath the canvas again.

"They're after a motorboat!" she reported tensely. "Harper has one he keeps locked in a boathouse."

"How close are we to the bend in the river?"

"About twenty yards."

The swift current was doing its best for the girls, swinging their boat toward the bend. Once beyond it, they would be temporarily hidden from the pier. But the current also was tending to carry them farther and farther from shore.

"Do we dare row?" Penny asked nervously.

"Not yet. Harper is having trouble getting the engine of his boat started," Sally reported. "We'll be safe for a minute or two. We're getting closer to the bend."

To the nervous girls, the boat scarcely seemed to move. Then at last it passed the bend and they were screened by willow trees and bushes.

"Now!" Sally signalled in a tense whisper.

Throwing off the sail, they seized oars and paddled with all their strength.

"Quiet!" Sally warned as Penny's oar made a splash. "Sounds carry plainly over the water."

The blast of a motorboat engine told them that Harper and his companion had started in pursuit.

Only a minute or two would be required for them to round the bend.

Throwing caution to the winds, Sally and Penny dug in with their oars, shooting their craft toward shore. The boat grated softly on the sand. Instantly, the girls leaped out, splashing through ankle-deep water.

As Sally was about to start across the beach, Penny seized her hand.

"We mustn't leave a trail of footprints this time!" she warned.

Treading a log at the water's edge, Penny walked its length to firm ground which took no visible shoe print. Sally followed her to a clump of bushes where they crouched and waited.

Barely had they taken cover when the motorboat came into view, heading for the little cove. There Claude Harper recaptured the runaway rowboat, tying it to the stern of the other craft.

Suddenly Penny was dismayed as she realized that in their flight, a most important detail had been overlooked.

"The oars!" she whispered. "They're wet!"

"Maybe the men won't see," Sally said hopefully. "We left them half covered by the canvas."

Intent only upon returning to the pier, Claude Harper and his companion failed to notice anything

amiss. Apparently assuming the boat had been carelessly tied and had drifted away under its own power, they were not suspicious.

"That was a narrow squeak," Penny sighed in relief as the motorboat with the other craft in tow finally disappeared around the bend. "The oars will quickly dry in the sun, so I guess we're safe."

Now that they were well out of trouble, the adventure seemed fun. Penny glanced at her wristwatch, observing that it was past four o'clock.

"Jack will be waiting for me," she said to Sally. "I'll have to hurry."

"We'll have plenty of time," Sally returned carelessly. "You usually can count on Jack being half an hour late for appointments."

Walking swiftly along the deserted shore, the girls discussed what they had overheard at the Harpers.

"We stirred up a big fuss and didn't learn too much," Penny said regretfully. "All the same, it looks as if the Harpers and Sweeper Joe are mixed up in this brass business together."

"They spoke of having something stored in the basement. That is what interests me. Oh, Penny, if only we could go back there sometime when the Harpers are gone and really investigate!"

"Maybe we can."

Sally shook her head. "Ma Harper almost never

goes away from home. But sometimes she has streams of visitors from Osage—mostly women. I've often wondered why."

"Factory girls?"

"No, they're housewives and every type of person. I think Mrs. Harper must be selling something to them, but I never could figure it out."

The *River Queen* was at the far side of the river, so Sally, for lack of occupation, walked on with Penny to the dock where she was to meet Jack. Greatly to their surprise, he was there ahead of them, and evidently had been waiting for some length of time.

Seeing the girls, he slowly arose to his feet.

"Well, Jack, what did you learn at the factory?" Penny asked eagerly.

"Why, not much of anything."

"You mean you weren't able to find out the name of the man who dropped his badge aboard the *Queen*?" Penny asked incredulously.

"Of course you learned the name if you really tried," Sally added. "Every single badge used at your factory would be recorded!"

Thus trapped, Jack said lamely: "Oh, I learned his name all right. Take it easy, and I'll tell you."

CHAPTER

16

SILK STOCKINGS

PUZZLED BY Jack's behavior and his evident reluctance to reveal what he had learned, Penny and Sally sat down beside him on the dock. At their urging he said:

"Well, I traced the number through our employment office. The badge was issued to a worker named Adam Glowershick."

Neither of the girls ever had heard of the name, but Sally, upon studying the picture again, was sure she recalled having seen him as a passenger aboard the *River Queen*.

"He's a punch press operator," Jack added.

"And he's the man you thought you knew?" Penny asked curiously.

"Yes. As I told you, I've seen him at the Harpers."

Jack acted ill at ease.

The girls exchanged a quick glance. But they did not tell Jack of their recent adventure.

"Well, why don't we have the fellow arrested?" Sally demanded after a moment of silence. "I'm satisfied he stole the brass lantern. He probably came aboard for money, and unable to get into the safe, took the trophy for meanness."

"Or he may be mixed up with the gang of factory brass thieves," Penny supplied.

"You can't prove a case against a man, because he might have dropped the badge anytime he happened to be a passenger aboard the ferry," Jack said. "It would do no good to have him booked on suspicion."

"Is he a friend of yours?" Sally asked significantly.

"Of course not!"

"Jack is right about it," Penny interposed hastily. "We need more information before we ask police to make an arrest. Any other news, Jack?"

"Nothing startling. But you know that detective your father brought here from Riverview?"

"Heiney?"

"Yes, he reported today that Sweeper Joe contacted him again, offering to sell a large quantity of brass. An appointment has been made for the delivery Friday night. If it proves to be stolen brass, then he's trapped himself."

"Can they prove it's the same brass?"

"Heiney numbers and records every piece he buys. He should be able to establish a case."

Knowing that her father had intended to keep the

junkman's activities a secret, Penny was disturbed by Jack's talking in public. Evidently he had gleaned this latest information from his father. She was even more troubled by his attitude toward Adam Glowershick.

Presently saying goodbye to Sally, she and Jack returned to Shadow Island. A strange boat was tied up in the berth usually occupied by the *Spindrift*. Since the sailboat was nowhere along the dock, it was evident that Mr. Gandiss, his wife, and Mr. Parker had gone for an outing on the river.

"We seem to have a visitor," Penny remarked.

Jack said nothing, but intently studied the man who slouched near the boathouse, hat pulled low to shade his eyes from the sun glare.

"Why, isn't that the same fellow whose picture was on the factory badge?" Penny exclaimed. "Adam Glowershick!"

"Careful or he'll hear you," Jack warned, scowling. "I know this man. He's here to see me."

Penny gazed again at the stranger who had dark bushy hair and prominent cheekbones. "If that isn't Glowershick, it's his twin!" she thought, and asked Jack if he had the factory badge with him.

"No, I haven't," he answered irritably. "Furthermore, I wish you would cut out such wild speculation. He'll hear you."

Jack brought the boat in. Leaping ashore, he asked

Penny to fasten the ropes. "I'll be back in a minute," he flung at her as he strode off.

It took time to make the craft secure. When Penny glanced up from her work, Jack and the stranger had disappeared behind the boathouse.

"Queer how fast Jack ducked out of here," she thought.

More than a little annoyed by the boy's behavior, Penny started up the gravel path to the house. Midway there she heard footsteps, and turning, saw Jack hastening after her.

"Penny—" he began diffidently.

She waited for him to go on.

"I hate to ask this," he said uncomfortably, "but how are you fixed for money?"

"I have a little. Dad gave me a fairly large sum to spend when we came here."

"Could you let me have twenty dollars? It would only be a loan for a few days. I—I wouldn't ask it, only I need it badly."

"Dad only gave me twenty-five, Jack."

"I'll pay you back in just a few days, Penny. Honest I will."

"I'll help you out of your jam," Penny agreed unwillingly, "but something tells me I shouldn't do it. Your parents—"

"Don't say anything to them about it," Jack pleaded. "My father gives me a good allowance, and

if he knew I had spent all of it ahead, he'd have a fit."

Penny went to her room for the money, returning with four crisp five dollar bills. She had planned to buy a new dress but now it must wait.

"Thanks," Jack said gratefully, fairly snatching the money from her hand. "Oh, yes, another favor—please don't mention to my folks that anyone was here today."

"Who is the man, Jack?"

"Oh, just a fellow I met." The boy started moving away. Penny, however, pursued him down the path.

"Not so fast, Jack. Since I have a financial interest in your affairs now, it's only fair that I ask a few questions. Did you meet this man at the Harpers?"

"What if I did?"

"Now you're in debt to him and he's pressing you for money. You don't want your parents to know."

"Something like that," Jack muttered, avoiding her steady gaze.

"I don't like being a party to anything I fail to understand. Jack, if you expect me to keep quiet about this, you'll have to make a promise."

"What is it?"

"That you'll not go to the Harpers' again."

"Okay, I'll promise," Jack agreed promptly. "The truth is, I've had enough of the place. Now, is the lecture concluded?"

"Quite finished," Penny replied.

With troubled eyes she watched Jack return to the boathouse and hand her money to the bushy-haired stranger.

"Maybe that fellow isn't Glowershick," she thought, "but he certainly looks like the picture. If Jack should be mixed up with those brass thieves—"

Penny deliberately dismissed the idea from her mind. A guest of the Gandiss' family, she could not permit herself to distrust Jack. He was inclined to be wild, irresponsible and at times arrogant, yet she had never questioned his basic character. Even though it disturbed her to know that he had given money to the stranger, she refused to believe that he was dishonest or that he would betray his father's trust.

If Penny hoped that Jack would offer a complete explanation for his actions, she was disappointed. After the stranger had gone, he deliberately avoided her. And that night at dinner, he had very little to say.

When the meal was finished, Jack roved restlessly about the house, not knowing what to do with himself. "I hope you're planning on staying home tonight," his mother commented. "Lately, you've scarcely spent an evening here."

"There's nothing to do on an island," Jack complained. "I thought I might run in to town for an hour or so."

He met Penny's gaze and amended hastily: "On

second thought, I guess I won't. How about an exciting game of chess?"

The evening was dull, heightened only by Mr. Gandiss' discussion of the latest difficulties at the factory. Another large quantity of brass had disappeared, he revealed to Mr. Parker.

"Perhaps our detectives will solve the mystery eventually," he declared, "but I'm beginning to lose heart. The firm has lost \$60,000 already, and the thieves become bolder each day. At the start, only a small ring operated. Now I am convinced at least ten or fifteen employes may be in on the scheme to defraud me."

"The brass must be smuggled past the gateman," Mr. Parker commented thoughtfully.

"We have three of them," Mr. Gandiss replied. "Several persons have been turned in, but nothing ever could be proved against any individual who was searched."

Deeply interested in her father's remark, Penny kept thinking about Clark Clayton, the night-shift gateman, and his apparent friendship with Sweeper Joe. Late the next afternoon when she knew he would be on duty, she purposely arrived at the factory just as a large group of employes was leaving.

Though at his usual post, Clark Clayton did not appear especially alert. As employes filed past him, he

paid them no special heed. Several persons who carried bulky packages were not even stopped for inspection.

"Why, a person could carry a ton of brass through that gate and he wouldn't know the difference!" she thought.

Making no attempt to enter the grounds, Penny watched for a while. Then she hailed a taxi cab, and told the driver to take her to the river.

They were nearing the docks when the man, glancing back over his shoulder, said carelessly: "How would you like to buy some genuine silk stockings?"

"How would I like to stake out a claim to part of the moon!" Penny countered, scarcely knowing how to take the question.

"No, I'm serious," the cab driver went on, slowing the taxi to idling pace. "I know a woman along the river who has a pretty fair stock of genuine silk stockings. Beauties."

"Black market?" Penny asked with disapproval.

"Well, no, I wouldn't call it that," the man argued. "She had a supply of these stockings and wants to get rid of them. Nothing wrong in that. Five dollars a pair."

"Five dollars a pair!" Penny echoed, barely keeping her temper.

"If I took you there, she might let you have them for a dollar less."

Penny opened her lips to tell the black market "runner" what she thought of a person who would engage in such illegal business. Then she closed them again and did a little quick thinking. After all, it might be wise to learn where the place was and then report to the police.

"Well, I don't know," she said, pretending to hesitate. "I'd like to have a pair of silk stockings, but I haven't much money with me. Where is the place?"

"Not far from here along the river. I'll drive you there, and if you make a purchase, you needn't pay me any fare."

"All right, that's fair enough. Let's go," Penny agreed.

As they rattled along the street, she carefully memorized the cab's number, and took mental notes on the driver's appearance, intending to report him to police. No doubt he received a generous commission for bringing customers to the establishment, she reasoned.

The cab had not gone far when it began to slacken pace. Peering out, Penny was astonished to see that they were stopping in front of the Harper house, overlooking the river.

"Is this the place?" she gasped, as the driver swung open the door. "I—I don't believe I want to go in after all. I thought you were taking me to a shop."

"You can't get silk stockings anywhere else in the county," the driver said. "Not like the kind Ma

Harper sells. Just go on in and tell her I brought you. She'll treat you right."

Taking Penny by the elbow, he half pulled her from the cab and started her toward the shabby, unpainted dwelling.

CHAPTER

17

BASEMENT LOOT

WHILE THE cab driver waited, Penny crossed the sagging porch and rapped on the door. Evidently the taxi's approach had been noted, for almost at once Ma Harper appeared.

She was a tall, thin woman, sallow of face, and with a hard glint to her eyes. Penny was not in the least deceived by the smile that was bestowed upon her.

"Hello, deary," the woman greeted her, stepping aside for her to enter. "Did Ernst bring you to buy something?"

"He spoke of silk stockings," Penny returned cautiously. "I'm not sure that I'll care to purchase them."

"Oh, you will when you see them, deary," Ma Harper declared in a chirpy tone. "Just come in and I'll show them to you."

"Aren't genuine silk stockings hard to get now?"

"I don't know of any place they can be bought except here. I was lucky to lay in a good supply before

the start of the war. Only one or two pairs are left now, but I'll let you have them, deary."

"That's very kind of you," returned Penny with dry humor.

"The stockings cost me plenty," went on the woman, motioning for the girl to seat herself on a sagging davenport. "I'll have to ask five dollars a pair."

She eyed Penny speculatively to note how the figure struck her. Penny had no intention of making a purchase at any price, but to keep the conversation rolling, she pretended to be interested.

"Five dollars ain't much when you consider you can't get stockings like these anywhere else," the woman added. "Just wait here, deary, and I'll bring 'em out." She went quickly from the room.

Left alone, Penny gazed with curiosity at the crude furnishings. Curtains hung at the windows, but they had not been washed in many months. The rug also was soiled and threadbare. The main piece of furniture, a table, stood in the center of the room.

Double doors opened out upon a balcony above the river. Wandering outside, Penny could see the *River Queen* plying its way far downstream. Closer by, a small boat with an outboard approached.

Due to the glare of a late afternoon sun on the water, she could not at first distinguish its two occupants. The boat, however, looked familiar.

"That's the same boat Sally and I escaped in yesterday!" she thought. "And it's coming here!"

Nearer and nearer the craft approached, until Penny could see the men's faces plainly. One was Sweeper Joe and the other, Clark Clayton, gateman at the Gandiss factory.

"If they see me here, they're certain to be suspicious!" Penny thought in panic. "They'll remember having seen me with Mr. Gandiss at the factory. I'll skip while the skipping is good!"

She turned to find Ma Harper standing in the doorway. "Anything wrong, deary?" the woman asked in a soft purr.

"Why, no," Penny stammered. "I—I was just admiring the river view."

"You were lookin' at that boat so funny-like I thought maybe you knew the men. Sure there ain't nothing wrong?"

"Of course not!" Penny was growing decidedly uncomfortable. She tried to slip through the doorway, but Ma Harper did not move aside.

"It's getting late," Penny said, glancing at her wrist watch. "Perhaps I should come some other time to look at the stockings. Shall we say tomorrow?"

"I have the hosiery right here, deary. Beauties, ain't they?"

Ma Harper spread one of the filmy stockings over her rough, callous hand. The silk was fine and beauti-

ful, unquestionably pre-war and of black market origin.

"Yes, they are lovely," Penny said nervously. "But the truth is, I haven't five dollars with me. I'll have to come back later."

Ma Harper's dark eyes snapped angrily.

"Then what you been takin' my time for?" she demanded. "Say—" she accused with sudden suspicion, her gaze roving to the boat which now was close to the pier. "—you seem in a mighty big hurry to get away from here all at once!"

"Why, no, it's just that the taxi man is waiting, and it's getting late."

"What's your name anyhow?"

"Penny Parker."

"Where do you live?"

"I am a summer vacationist."

The answers only partially satisfied Ma Harper. Evidently she was afraid that Penny might be an investigator, for she debated a moment. Then she said: "You wait here until I talk to someone."

"But I really must be leaving."

"You wait here, I said!" Ma Harper snapped. "Maybe you're okay, but I ain't takin' no chances on you getting me into trouble about these stockings. Wait until I talk to Joe."

Leaving Penny on the balcony, she went out by way of the front living room door. After it had

closed, there was a sharp little click which made the girl fear she had been locked in.

The truth was quickly ascertained. The door was locked. For an instant, Penny was frightened, but she told herself she was not really a prisoner. There were windows she could unfasten, and another door at the rear of the house.

Intending to test it, she went quickly through the kitchen. Voices reached her ears. Evidently Ma Harper and the two men were standing close to the door, and although speaking in low tones she could hear most of the conversation.

"The girl may be all right, but I think she was sent here to spy!" Ma reported. "If we let her go, she may bring the police down on us!"

"And if you try to hold her here, you'll soon be in trouble!" one of the men answered. Penny thought the voice was that of Clark Clayton. "You and this petty stocking business of yours! We warned you to lay off it."

"Sure, blame me!" Ma's voice rose angrily. "The truth is, you're getting scared of your own racket. I was sellin' stockings and makin' a good, safe income until you come along and talked my husband into lettin' you store your loot in our basement. Well, I've made up my mind! You're gettin' the stuff out of here tonight, and you're not bringing any more in!"

"Okay, okay," growled Sweeper Joe. "Just take

it easy, and quit your yippin'. We'll move the stuff as soon as it gets dark. Fact is, we've made a deal with a guy that runs a junk shop near the factory. He's offered us a good price. We had to play along slow and easy to be sure he wasn't tied up with the cops."

"What about the girl?" Ma demanded. "If I let her go, she's apt to get me into hot water about those stockings."

"That's your funeral," Joe the Sweeper retorted. "If you'd handled her right, she wouldn't have become suspicious."

The discussion went on, in lower tones. Then Penny heard Ma say:

"Okay, that's the way we'll do it. I'll think up some story to convince the girl. But that brass must be out of here tonight! Another thing, you can't sell the lantern that simpleton, Adam Glowershick, stole from the *River Queen*."

"Why not?" Sweeper Joe demanded. "There's good brass in it."

"You stupid lout!" Ma exclaimed, losing patience. "That lantern is known to practically every person along the waterfront. Let it show up in a pawnshop or second hand store, and the police would trace it straight to us. You'll have to heave it into the river."

"Okay, maybe you're right," the factory worker admitted.

Penny had learned enough to feel certain that brass, stolen piecemeal from the Gandiss factory, had been stored in the Harper basement. Even more astonishing was the information that the trophy taken from the *River Queen* also was somewhere in the house.

"If the lantern is thrown into the river, no one ever be able to recover it," she thought. "If only I could get it now and sneak away through a window!"

Penny's pulse stepped up a pace, for she knew that to venture into the basement was foolhardy. She listened again at the door. Ma and the men still were talking, but how long they would continue to do so, she could not guess.

"I'll risk it," she decided.

The basement door opened from an inside wall of the kitchen. Penny groped her way down the steep, dark stairs but could find no light switch.

The cellar room was damp and dirty. As her eyes became accustomed to the dim light which filtered in through two small windows, she saw a furnace surrounded by buckets of ashes and boxes of papers and trash. A clothes line was hung with stockings and silk underwear.

Penny poked into several of the boxes and barrels. All were empty. Then her gaze focused upon another door, which apparently led into a fruit or storage room. It was padlocked.

"The brass is locked in there!" she thought, her heart sinking. "The lantern too! How stupid of me not to expect it."

Without tools, Penny could not hope to break into the locked room. There was only one thing to do. She must get away from the house, and bring the police!

Starting up the stairs, she stopped short. An outside door had slammed. In the room above she heard footsteps, but no voices.

Frightened, Penny remained motionless on the basement stairs. She could hear Ma Harper tramping about, evidently in search of her, for the woman muttered angrily to herself.

"I don't dare stay here," the girl thought. "I'll have to make a dash for it."

Penny reasoned that in reentering the house, Ma Harper probably had left the front door unlocked. What had become of the two men she did not know, but she would have to take a chance on their whereabouts.

Noiselessly, she crept up the stairs to the kitchen door, opening it a tiny crack. Though she could not see Ma, footsteps told her that the woman had stepped out onto the balcony overlooking the river.

"This will be as good a chance as I may get," she reasoned.

The door squeaked as she opened it wide enough

to slip through. Unnerved by the sound, Penny moved swiftly across the kitchen to the living room.

"So there you are!" cried Ma Harper from the balcony.

Penny threw caution to the winds. Darting across the room, she jerked at the outside door. It opened, but on the porch, facing her, stood Sweeper Joe and Clark Clayton!

CHAPTER

18

OVER THE BALCONY

PANIC-STRICKEN, Penny's first thought was to try to dart past the men. But she realized that to do so would be impossible. Warned by Ma Harper's excited cries, they had moved into position to completely block her path.

"Stop that girl!" shouted Ma Harper, bearing down upon her from the direction of the river balcony. "She's from the police and sent here to get evidence!"

Whirling around, Penny ran back toward the kitchen, with the woman in pursuit. She did not waste time testing the rear door, for she already knew it to be locked.

However, opening from the kitchen was another closed door which appeared to give exit. With no time to debate, Penny jerked it open and darted inside.

Instantly, she saw that she had made a serious mistake. She had entered a small washroom and had

trapped herself. And Ma Harper was practically upon her.

Penny did the only possible thing. She slammed the door and turned the key in the lock. For a moment at least, she was beyond reach.

"I've really trapped myself now!" she thought, recapturing her breath. "What a mess! If I had used my head this wouldn't have happened."

Penny sat down on the edge of the bathtub to think. Already Ma Harper was pounding and thumping on the flimsy wooden door panel. The door rattled on its hinges.

"You open up or I'll break down the door!" the woman shouted furiously. "You hear me?"

Penny did not answer. There was no escape from the washroom for it had no window. The tub upon which she sat was ringed with dirt, evidently having seen no use in many weeks. Above her head stretched a short clothesline upon which hung a row of Ma Harper's stockings.

"You let me in!" Ma Harper shouted again. "If I ever lay hands on you, you'll pay for this!"

The threat left Penny entirely unmoved. She had no intention of opening the door, no matter what the woman might say or do.

Realizing that her tactics were gaining nothing, Ma tried another approach.

"Please let me in," she coaxed in a falsely sweet

voice. "We won't hurt you. If you come out now, we'll let you go home just as you want to do."

Penny was not to be so easily taken in. She remained silent.

Ma Harper lost her temper completely then. She kicked at the door and shouted for the two men.

"Joe! Clark! Come and help me get this brat out of here!"

Penny, certain that her moments of freedom were limited, heard the two men approach. A heavy body heaved itself against the door, but still the lock held.

"I don't want my door smashed," she heard Ma Harper whine. "Can't you get a screwdriver and take off the hinges? There ain't no other key in the house."

The reply of the men was inaudible, but Penny heard their retreating footsteps. The door knob kept rattling, so she decided Ma Harper had been left there to keep watch.

"This probably is my only chance to escape!" Penny reasoned. "I might unlock the door and take a chance on overpowering Ma Harper. But she's a strong woman!"

Her roving gaze fastened upon the line of drying stockings, and suddenly she had an idea! Jerking one of the stockings down, she seized a thick bar of soap from the dish above the bathtub, and crammed it deep into the toe of the stocking.

"This will make a superb weapon!" she thought gleefully. "Almost as good as a blackjack!"

Taking a firm grip on the stocking, Penny swung it several times to be certain of its possibilities. Then she was ready.

Quickly she unlocked the door and stepped back.

For a moment nothing happened. Then Ma Harper pushed it open, just as she had expected.

"Now I'll get you!" she screamed, springing at Penny.

Penny kept the stocking behind her back. "I hate to do this," she thought, "but she's asking for it!"

As Ma reached out to seize her, she swung the stocking. The encased cake of soap cut a neat arc through the air and clipped the woman sharply on the head.

More startled than hurt, she stumbled backwards and collapsed into the bathtub.

Pausing only long enough to see that Ma was not really injured, Penny made a dash for safety. But her escape was cut off.

Sweeper Joe and Clayton the gateman were just entering the front door of the living room, armed with tools to use in taking down the washroom door.

Seeing Penny, they again blocked the exit. Desperate, she ran in the only possible direction—to the balcony overlooking the river.

The docks were directly beneath the house, and waves lapped the posts of the two-story porch. It was

at least a fifteen-foot drop and the water was shallow. But Penny had no time to calculate the risk.

Leaping to the railing of the balcony, she poised there an instant, staring down at the rocks plainly visible in the still water.

Then, as Sweeper Joe reached out to grasp her by the shoulder, she jumped.

She struck the water head foremost in a shallow dive which wrenched her back but kept her from striking the river bottom. Brushing wet hair from her eyes, she began to stroke. Her shoes were heavy as lead and impeded her.

The force of Penny's dive had carried her many feet from shore into deep water, and the river current swept her farther away from the docks. Weighted down by the shoes, she knew she did not have sufficient strength to swim to shore with them on.

Burying her face in the water, she doubled up, and groping down, untied them, one at a time.

"Those were good shoes," she thought with regret as she kicked them off and saw them settle into the river.

Penny struck out with smooth crawl strokes for the nearby pier. Her skirt kept wrapping itself about her legs. Unwilling to discard it, she tucked it high about her waist which made swimming much easier.

Reaching the pier, she was pulling herself out onto

it, when Ma Harper and the two men came running out of the house to intercept her.

"Oh! Oh!" thought Penny. "It's not going to be as easy as I assumed."

Joe ran out on the pier, while Ma and the other man separated, one starting upstream and the other down. No matter which way she turned, Penny saw that her escape would be cut off.

The river was wide, the current swift. Although an excellent swimmer, she had no desire to attempt such a contest of endurance. But there seemed no other way.

Deliberately pushing off from the pier, she swam directly away from shore. After a dozen strokes she rolled over on her back for a moment to see what was happening. Ma Harper had shouted to Joe, and the words carried plainly over the water.

"Take after her in the boat! We don't dare let her get away now! She knows too much!"

Penny had forgotten the motorboat tied up at the pier. Now as she saw Joe and Clark Clayton run toward it, her heart sank.

Though the race seemed hopeless, she flopped over onto her face again, and swam with all her strength. Going with the current, her feet churned the water behind her.

Several times, the men tried without success to start

the motorboat engine. Penny grew hopeful. Then she heard the blast as the motor caught, and knew that in just a minute the men would overtake her.

Frantically, she glanced about for help. Already late afternoon, there were no fishing boats on the river. Save for Ma Harper, who stood ready to seize her should she try to swim in to the beach, no other persons were visible on either shore. The *River Queen* apparently was at the far end of her run, hidden beyond the bend.

A hundred yards away, in shallow water, lay a large patch of tall river grass and cat-tails. Seeing it, Penny took new hope. The area was large enough to offer a temporary refuge if she could reach it! Not only would the dense mat of high grass protect her from view, but a boat would not be able to follow.

Starting to swim again, she put everything she had into each stroke. It would be pinch and go to reach the grass patch! Aware of her intention, Sweeper Joe and Clark Clayton had changed course, hoping to intercept her.

CHAPTER

19

FLIGHT

THE HIGH water grass loomed up and Penny's feet struck a muddy bottom. With the boat almost upon her, she plunged into the morass. The water came to armpit level. Pushing aside the thick stalks which wrapped themselves about her arms and body, she waded far into the patch before she paused.

Hidden by the dense growth, she could not at first see the pursuing boat. She knew, however, that it had halted at the edge of the patch, for the motor had been cut off.

And after awhile she heard voices, low spoken, but nevertheless clear, for the slightest sound carried over water.

"She's over there somewhere in the center of the patch!" one of the men muttered. "I could tell where she went by the way the grass moved. Shall we let her go?"

"No, we got to get her or she'll tell everything she

knows to old man Gandiss and the police!" the other answered.

With the motor shut off, the two men then took out paddles, and began to force the boat through the jungle of grass. Observing that they were coming straight toward her, Penny noiselessly waded on, taking every precaution not to move the stalks unnecessarily. Noting the direction of the wind, she went with it, hoping that any movement of the grass would appear to be caused by the stiff breeze.

But she hoped in vain. For suddenly Joe the Sweeper shouted hoarsely:

"There she is! Over there!" He pointed with his paddle blade.

The men pushed the boat on, smashing the grass ahead of them. In despair, Penny saw that wherever she went she was leaving a trail of trampled, broken grass behind her.

No longer trying to prevent splashes, she waded in a wide half-circle. Then quickly she back-tracked, this time making not a sound. Slipping into the dense growth just beside the trail she had made, she breathlessly waited.

The boat came into view. Taking a deep breath, Penny ducked under water. Opening her eyes, she could see the blurred, dark bottom of the craft moving slowly toward her, so close she could have reached out and touched it.

Her breath began to grow short. The boat barely seemed to move. Penny's lungs felt as if they were ready to burst, but still she remained under water.

Then the men had passed, and she dared raise her head for an instant to gulp in air. The boat reached the end of the trail through the grass that Penny herself had made. There it halted, as Sweeper Joe and his companion, realizing they had lost their quarry, debated their next move.

"She was here a minute ago!" Sweeper Joe growled. "I caught a glimpse of her clothes, and saw the grass move. Where did she go?"

"She must have doubled back."

With difficulty the men turned the boat around and rowed toward Penny again. When she dared wait no longer, she submerged again.

They passed her and she came up for air. A water snake slithered through the grass, almost touching her hand.

Startled, Penny leaped backwards, making an ugly, loud splash in the water. Slight as was the sound, it told the men where she hid. Turning in the boat, they saw her through the grass, and bore toward her again.

By this time, Penny actually enjoyed the desperate game of hide and seek, for so far, the advantage had been hers. She stood watching the boat until it came very close.

Then she dived, coming up directly underneath the

craft. Getting her shoulder squarely under one side, she raised up, and with an ease that surprised her, upset the boat.

The two men went sprawling into the water. Unable to swim, they made animal noises and clutched desperately at the grass for support. But as their feet found solid footing, they started furiously toward Penny. Taking her time, and deliberately seeking deeper water, she waded away.

"That will hold them for a few minutes," she thought gleefully. "I'll get out of this jungle now, and swim ashore."

One more the girl's hopes were rudely dashed. As she reached the edge of the grass area, she was disconcerted to see another rowboat approaching from the direction of the Harper place. With shadows deepening on the water, she could not at first distinguish the man. Then she recognized Claude Harper.

"He must have come home, and Ma sent him here to help capture me!" she thought. "If I swim out now, I'll certainly be caught."

Crouching down so that her nose was just above the water, she waited. Claude Harper rowed on, resting upon his oars when perhaps ten yards away.

"Joe!" he called.

There was an answering shout from the center of the grass patch.

"That gal's somewhere close by!" Sweeper Joe

shouted in warning. "She upset our boat. Stay where you are, and see that she doesn't slip past you!"

Thus warned, Claude Harper began to survey the grass patch intently. He looked hard at the place where Penny stood. She was certain he had seen her, but after a moment, he turned slightly, and his eyes roved on.

As she hesitated, not knowing what to do, Sweeper Joe and Clark Clayton, who had bailed out their boat, came paddling out to meet Harper. Wet and plastered with mud, they had lost one of the paddles.

"If you ain't sights!" Harper cackled upon seeing them. He slapped his thigh in glee. "You look like a couple o' stupid mud turtles!"

"Fool!" rasped Sweeper Joe. "Don't you have sense enough to figure what will happen if that girl gets away from us?"

"You ain't goin' back to no job at the Gandiss factory. Nor Clayton neither!"

"It's a lot more serious than that!" Joe snapped. He guided the boat alongside Harper's craft. "Why do you think I took that job in the first place, and spent better than two years studyin' the Gandiss factory layout? I lined up the employes we could get to go along with us, got everything organized—and now this gal has to bust up the show just as the profits begin to roll in!"

"Better pipe down," Harper warned curtly. "She

can hear you, and so can everyone else on the river."

"What's the difference?" Joe argued in disgust. "We're through. I'm gettin' out of this town tonight!"

"Me with you," added Clark Clayton. "Ever since Gandiss put detectives on the job, I figured the game was gettin' too dangerous."

Now it was Claude Harper who lost his temper. "Hold on," he said warningly. "It's all right for you guys to blow town, but what about me and the wife?"

"You can do what you please," Joe retorted.

"We got your brass cached in our basement. If the cops should find it there, we'd take the rap."

"Get rid of it."

"That's a lot easier said than done. Besides, that brass is worth a tidy sum o' money."

"Then why not sell it tonight?" Joe proposed suddenly. "If we can get it to the junkman who has a place across from the factory, he'll pay us a good price. We can complete the deal, and still get out of town before midnight."

"That's okay for you," Harper argued, "but Ma and I own property here, and we got a good business."

"It was your stupid wife's stocking business that got us into this jam!" Clark Clayton snarled.

"I ain't talkin' about that. I mean our dance hall. We clean up about a hundred bucks every Saturday night."

"You should have thought about that before you went in with us," Joe retorted. "You knew the risks you were taking. Anyway, this mess was your wife's making."

A silence fell, and then Clark Clayton said: "We ain't gettin' nowhere. We got to decide what we're goin' to do, and we got to make sure that gal don't get out o' this weed patch until we've arranged our escape."

In whispers, the men conferred. Though Penny strained her ears, she could not catch a single word. However, a plan satisfactory to the three seemed to have been formulated, for presently, the two boats separated.

Sweeper Joe and Clark Clayton paddled off, heading for the pier at the Harper's. The other man remained in his rowboat, unquestionably detailed to keep watch of the grass patch and prevent the girl's escape.

To amuse himself, he began to call out to her, though he could not see her or know where she was.

"You think you're a clever one!" he taunted. "But you jest wait! We'll get you out o' there, and when we do, you ain't goin' to like it!"

Lest a movement of the grass or a splash betray her, Penny remained perfectly still. Shadows deepened on the river for night was fast coming on. Her muscles became stiff and cramped. The wind chilled her to

the very bone, and the water which at first had not seemed unbearably cold, made her teeth chatter and dance. Each minute became an hour as the torture increased.

"I'll have to do something," she thought desperately. "I can't endure this much longer."

CHAPTER

20

A DESPERATE FLIGHT

IN THE rowboat, Claude Harper slowly patrolled the area, keeping an alert watch for the slightest movement amid the grass. Once as a crane arose from the dense growth into the darkening sky, he focused a flashlight beam on the spot.

"He's prepared to stay here half the night if necessary," Penny thought, shivering.

She could think of no means of escape. When it became completely dark, she might be able to swim away without being detected. But long exposure in cold water had weakened her, and she was none too certain of her ability to reach shore.

Her absence at the island surely must have been noticed by this time, she reasoned. Why was not a boat sent in search of her?

"I hope they don't assume I am staying with Sally for the night," she worried.

Penny's thoughts were momentarily distracted as

she heard indistinct voices from the direction of the Harper dock. Lights had been turned on in the house and basement.

"Those men are getting rid of the stolen brass," she reasoned. "If they try to sell it to Heiney, they still may be caught."

Presently the motorboat moved away from the Harper dock, its engine laboring. The craft was sunk low in the water as if from a heavy load.

The boat did not turn down stream as Penny expected. Instead, it crossed the river at right angles, stopping in mid-stream at the deepest part of the channel. There the engine was cut off.

"Now what?" thought Penny.

Claude Harper likewise seemed puzzled by the action, for he turned to stare, muttering to himself.

Though Penny could not see what the men were doing aboard the boat, she heard a loud splash as something heavy was dropped overboard.

"The fools!" Claude Harper exclaimed. "The fools!"

Another splash and still another followed. Then the boat turned and came toward the grass patch. Claude Harper hailed the men with an angry exclamation.

"You idiots! After all the risk we've taken, you dump our profits in the river!"

"Keep your shirt on!" Sweeper Joe retorted. "It was the only thing to do. Glowershick just phoned from town."

"What'd he have to report?"

"Nothing good. You know that junk shop where we arranged to sell our stuff? Where the owner offered us a higher price than any other place in town?"

"Well?"

"He was a dick, planted there by old man Gandiss himself. They've already got wind of who's in on the deal."

"Then if we try to sell the brass anywhere else, we'll be pinched."

"You're catching on, Harper."

"Have you dumped all the stuff in the river?"

"It will take two more trips at least. And there's the brass lantern to get rid of," Joe added. "As soon as the job is done, Clark and me are gettin' out of the city."

"What are Ma and me gonna do?" Harper whined. "We've got property here."

"That's up to you," Joe snapped. "If it wasn't for the gal you'd be safe enough. Seen anything of her?"

"Nary a sign."

"She may have slipped away under water. The gal swims like an eel."

"I don't think she got away. I been watchin' like a hawk."

"She's sure to spill everything, and she's seen plenty," Joe muttered. "Even though the cops don't find any evidence, they could make it plenty tough for you and the missus."

"We got to leave town," Harper admitted. "After takin' all this risk and bein' all set to cash in big, it's a dirty break. It ain't fair."

"Squawkin' won't do no good," Joe said shortly. "The question is, what are we goin' to do about the gal?"

"We got to make sure she won't carry no tales until we're safely out of town."

"Then we'll have to flush her out of this bird nest," Joe decided. "There's a way we can do it."

The manner in which she was to be caught, soon became apparent to Penny. Systematically, the men began to flatten all of the grass with their paddles and oars. Foot by foot, she retreated. Their strategy was discouragingly clear. The flattened grass no longer offered protection. Soon it all would be level with the water, and she would have no screen.

So cold that her limbs were nearly paralyzed, Penny considered giving herself up. In any case, the outcome would be the same. The only other recourse was to scream for help, and hope that someone along the shore would hear her and investigate.

With only the Harper house close by, the prospect that anyone would come to her aid was practically nil.

Angered at not finding the girl, Harper and his companions swung their paddles viciously. Penny retreated further, still reluctant to abandon freedom.

Then far downstream, she saw the *River Queen*, recognizing it by the pattern its lights made above the water. The ferry had finished its passenger run, and now apparently was coming upstream to anchor for the night.

As Penny watched the boat, she took new hope. If only she could signal Captain Barker or Sally! Unless the ferry changed course, it was almost certain to pass the grass patch. However, with the water shallow there, it would give the area a wide berth.

"Even if I shouted for help, no one aboard would hear me," she reasoned. "But I'll have to try something! I'm finished if I stay here."

Straight up the river came the *Queen*. Penny could see a man in the lighted pilot house, but no one was visible on the decks. The ferry was traveling at a rapid speed.

Penny decided to wait no longer. Creeping to the very edge of the grass, she ducked under water, and started to swim. Her strength had gone even more than she realized. Arms and legs were so stiff they barely could press against the water as she stroked. A few feet and she was forced to come to the surface.

"There she is!" shouted Sweeper Joe. Bringing the boat around, he started directly for her.

Penny swam with all the power at her command, stroking deep and fast. Not daring to look back, she could hear the dip of Sweeper Joe's oars.

Straight toward the deepest part of the channel, she propelled herself. Her crawl strokes were jerky, but they carried her along. And she had calculated well. Aided by the current, she would intercept the path of the oncoming *River Queen*.

From the water, the ferryboat looked like an immense monster as it steamed majestically up the river. Not wishing to attract attention to himself or his companions, Joe shipped his oars and temporarily gave up the chase. But he remained close by, watching alertly. Should the ferryboat fail to see or pick up Penny, he would be after her upon the instant.

Treading water, the girl shouted for help and waved an arm. Her voice was weak even to her own ears, and could not possibly carry to the pilot house of the *Queen*. Would her frantic signals be seen? The night was dark, and she was not yet in the arc of the vessel's lights.

Penny swam a few more strokes, then treaded water again, and signaled frantically. The *River Queen* did not slacken speed.

"They haven't seen me!" she thought desperately. "It's useless."

Now a new danger presented itself. The *Queen* had swerved slightly so that Penny was directly in its path. Still she had not been seen. Looming up in gigantic proportions above her, the ferry threatened to run her down.

CHAPTER

21

RESCUE

FEARFUL THAT she would be killed, Penny screamed and waved. Straight on steamed the *River Queen*, so close now that she could see Sally Barker on the starboard deck. But the girl was gazing away from her, toward Sweeper Joe and the other drifting boat.

"Help! Help!" screamed Penny in one last desperate attempt to save herself.

Her cry carried, for she saw Sally whirl around and stare intently at the dark water ahead. Then she shouted an order to her father. There came a clanging of bells, and the *Queen* swerved to port, missing Penny by a scant ten feet.

Great waves engulfed her, and she fought to keep above the surface. Her strength was practically gone. She rolled over on her back, gasping for breath.

Then she saw that the *Queen* had greatly reduced

speed and was turning back on her course. A lifeboat also was being lowered.

"They're going to pick me up!" Penny thought, nearly overcome by relief.

The next minute Sally and a sailor were pulling her into the boat.

"Why, it's Penny! And she's half drowned!" she heard her friend exclaim.

Then she knew no more.

When she opened her eyes, Penny found herself in a warm, comfortable bed. Sally stood beside her with a cup of steaming hot soup.

"You're coming around fine," she praised. "Drink this! Then you'll feel better."

Penny pulled herself up on an elbow and took a swallow of the soup. It was good and warmed her chilled body. She gulped the cupful down.

"Sally—"

"Better not try to talk too much now," Sally advised kindly. "How did you get into the water?"

The question aroused Penny, bringing back a flood of memories. She suddenly realized that she was in Sally's cabin on the *River Queen* and the ferry was moving.

"Where are we?" she asked.

"You're safe," Sally said soothingly. "You were swimming in the river. We nearly ran you down. Lucky I saw you just in time and we picked you up."

"Yes, I know," Penny agreed. "But *where* are we? Near the Harpers?"

"Oh, no, we passed their place long ago. We're far upriver."

Penny struggled up, swinging her feet out of the bunk. She saw then that she was wearing a pair of Sally's pajamas, and that her own wet garments hung over a chair.

"We must turn back!" she cried. "Tell Captain Barker, please! Oh, it's vitally important, Sally!"

Sally was maddeningly deliberate.

"Now don't get excited, Penny," she advised. "Everything will be all right."

Penny resisted as Sally tried to push her back into bed. "You don't understand!" she protested. "Sweeper Joe, Claude Harper, and Clark Clayton are expecting to make their get-away tonight. They're the ones who have been stealing brass from the Gandiss factory. It's all cached in the basement of the Harper house—or was unless they've dumped it."

"Penny, are you straight in your head? You know what you're saying?"

"I certainly do! I went there this afternoon. When I learned too much, they tried to hold me prisoner. I escaped by the river—hid in the grass patch. But they followed me there, and were about to get me, when the *River Queen* steamed by."

"I did see two small boats there. Just before you

shouted I wondered what they would be doing at this time of night."

"Sweeper Joe and Clark Clayton have been dumping the stolen brass! Unless police stop them before they dispose of it all, not a scrap of evidence will be left! All those men expect to leave town tonight!"

"Thank heavens, we have a ship-to-shore radio telephone!" Sally cried, thoroughly aroused. "I'll have Pop call the police right away!"

She bolted out the cabin door.

Every muscle and joint in Penny's body ached, but there was no time to think of her misery. Her own clothes could not be put on. Searching in Sally's wardrobe, she found a sweater and a skirt, and undergarments she needed. By the time her friend returned, she was dressed.

"Penny, you shouldn't have gotten up!" Sally protested quickly.

"I can't afford to miss the excitement," Penny grinned. "Hope you don't mind lending me some of your clothes."

"Of course not, and if you must stay up, you'll need a pair of shoes." Sally found a pair of sandals, which although too large, would serve. After Penny had put them on, she said: "Let's go to the pilot house, because I want you to tell Pop exactly what happened."

"Did you notify police?"

"Pop sent the message. It may take a little while, but police should be at the Harpers' almost anytime now."

"Those men saw me taken aboard this boat," Penny worried. "I'm afraid they'll get away before the police arrive."

The girls climbed to the pilot house where Captain Barker had just turned the wheel over to a helmsman. All members of the crew remained aboard, for with the *Queen* late on her run, there had been no opportunity as yet to put the men ashore.

"We may need all our hands tonight," Captain Barker predicted. "No telling what may develop. I have one of those feelings."

"Now Pop!" reproved Sally. "The last time you made a remark like that, we smashed a rudder. Remember?"

"Aye, I remember all too well," he rejoined grimly.

Urged by Sally, Penny related everything that had happened at the Harpers', and told of her endurance contest in the grass patch.

"We'll head back that direction and see what's doing," Captain Barker offered to satisfy her. "Maybe we'll catch sight of those rascals in their boats."

Although the *Queen* cruised slowly near the shoal area where Penny had encountered adventure, there was no sign of any small boat. The ferry crept dangerously close to the grass patch.

"Watch 'er like a cat!" Captain Barker warned the helmsman. "Cramp her! Cramp her!"

When the man did not react speedily enough, he seized the wheel and helped spin it hard down. The *Queen* responded readily, moving into deeper waters.

Satisfied that there were no small boats in the vicinity, Captain Barker, headed upstream toward the Harpers'. Across the water, lights were to be seen on both floors of the two-story river house, but so far as could be discerned, no boats were tied up at the pier or docks.

"The place isn't deserted, that's certain," Penny declared, peering into the wall of darkness. "How long should it take the police to get there?"

"If the radio message we sent was properly transmitted, they should be on their way now," the captain replied.

Sally, impatient for action, was all for taking a crew and descending upon the house and its occupants. Puffing thoughtfully at his pipe, her father considered the proposal, but shook his head.

"We have no authority to make a search," he pointed out. "Any such action would make us liable for court action. Just be patient and you'll see fireworks."

Knowing that to stand by near the Harpers' pier would warn the house occupants they were being watched, Captain Barker ordered the *Queen* to turn

downriver toward the main freight and passenger docks.

An excursion boat, the *Florence*, passed them, her railings lined with women and children who had enjoyed an all-day outing and were returning home. The steamer tied up at the Ninth Street dock and began to disgorge passengers.

Then it happened. Penny saw a sudden flash of flame which seemed to come from the hold of the excursion ship. The next instant fire shot from the portholes and began to spread.

Captain Barker gave a hoarse shout which sent a chill down her spine.

"The *Florence*!" he exclaimed huskily. "Her oil tanks must have exploded! She'll go up like matchwood, and with all those women and children aboard!"

CHAPTER

22

CAPTAIN BARKER'S COURAGE

NEVER DID a fire seem to spread so rapidly. In less than three minutes, as those aboard the *River Queen* watched in helpless horror, the *Florence* became a mass of flames from stem to stern. Terrified passengers jammed the gangplank as they tried to crowd ashore. Some of them leaped from the excursion boat's high railings to the dock below.

"Her mooring lines are ablaze!" Captain Barker shouted a moment later.

"And the freight sheds are catching afire," Penny added, observing a telltale line of flame starting from the flimsy wooden buildings along the wharf, directly back of the dock where the *Florence* had moored.

The blazing sheds worried Captain Barker far less than the fact that the mooring lines had caught fire. If the *Florence* should be cut loose from the dock, helpless women and children would be carried out onto the river in a flaming inferno.

"Why don't the fire boats get here!" Sally murmured nervously. "Oh, this is going to be a dreadful disaster if something isn't done to save those helpless people!"

At the bridge leading to the pilot house, Captain Barker stood tensely watching, his hand on the signal ropes.

"There go the mooring lines!" he shouted. "The current should bring her this way!"

As the *Florence* slowly drifted away from the blazing wharf, men and women began to leap over the railings into the dark waters.

"Man the lifeboats!" Captain Barker ordered his crew tersely. "I'm going to try to get a tow line on 'er!" He signaled the engine room, and the *River Queen* began to back rapidly toward the flaming excursion boat.

Penny and Sally ran to help launch the lifeboats. With the *River Queen* desperately short handed, they would be needed to handle oars. A fireman, an engineer, Captain Barker and a helmsman must remain at their posts, which left only three sailors to pick up passengers.

Leaping into the first boat launched, the girls rowed into the path of the blazing vessel. In its bright glow against the sky, they could see panic-stricken passengers running about the decks. An increasing number

were leaping into the water, and many could not swim.

Ignoring the cries of those who had life belts or were swimming strongly, they rapidly picked up survivors. To pull children aboard was a comparatively easy task. But many of the women were heavy, and the combined strength of the girls barely was sufficient to get them into the boat without upsetting.

Finally the lifeboat was filled beyond capacity, and they turned to land their cargo aboard the *Queen*. Only then did they see what Captain Barker intended to do.

His men had succeeded in making a line fast to the *Florence's* stern. By this time the excursion boat was a flaming inferno, with only a few passengers, the captain, and crew remaining aboard.

"Pop's going to tow the *Florence* downstream away from the freight sheds!" Sally cried. "Some of those buildings are filled with war materials awaiting shipment—coal, oil and I don't know what all! If a fire once gets going there, nothing will stop it!"

Working feverishly, the girls unloaded their passengers and went back for more. Motorboats had set out from shore, and they too aided in the rescue work. Some of the survivors were taken to land, and others were put aboard the *Queen*.

Aided by a sailor they had picked up, the girls

worked until they no longer could see bobbing heads in the swirling waters.

"We've done all we can," Sally gasped, as they helped the last of the passengers aboard the *Queen*. "The captain and most of his men will stay on the *Florence* as long as they are able."

Though exhausted by their work, the girls did what they could for those aboard. Sally distributed all the blankets she could find, and Penny helped a sailor revive two women who were unconscious from having swallowed too much water.

Suddenly there came a loud report like the crack of a pistol.

The tow line to the *Florence* had parted! Once more the excursion boat, now a roaring furnace, was adrift in mid-stream.

In an instant it was apparent to Penny what would happen. The cross-current was strong, and in a minute or two would carry the burning vessel into the wharves and sheds. When the boat struck, flying sparks would ignite the dry wood for a considerable distance, and soon the entire waterfront would be ablaze.

Though outwardly calm, Captain Barker was beset as he appraised the situation. It would not be possible to get another tow line onto the *Florence* for already her decks had become untenable for the crew. The blazing vessel was drifting rapidly.

"We could ram her," he muttered. "She might be nosed out into the channel again, and headed away from the freight docks."

"Wouldn't that be dangerous?" Sally asked anxiously. "We have at least fifty passengers aboard. In this high wind, the *Queen* would be almost certain to catch fire."

"There's nothing else to do," Captain Barker decided grimly, signaling the engine room. "The *Florence* is drifting fast, and before the fire boats can get here, half the waterfront will be ablaze. Have the passengers wet down the decks and stand by with buckets!"

Penny and Sally worked feverishly carrying out orders. The deck hose was attached, and buckets were brought from below and filled with water. All survivors who were able to help, cooperated to the fullest extent, helping wet down the decks and assisting women and children to the stern of the ferryboat.

Captain Barker had given an order for the *Queen* to move full speed ahead.

In a moment the two boats made jarring contact. Penny was thrown from her feet. Scrambling up, she saw that blazing timbers from the *Florence* had crashed directly onto the *River Queen's* deck. Sparks were falling everywhere. The ferryboat had caught fire in a dozen places.

Seizing a bucket of water, she doused out the flames

nearest her. Heat from the *Florence* was intense, and many of the men who had volunteered to help, began to retreat.

Penny and Sally stuck at their post, knowing that the lives of all depended upon extinguishing the flames quickly. Crew members of the *Florence* worked beside them with quiet, determined efficiency.

In the midst of the excitement, the final boatload of picked-up survivors had to be taken aboard. Captain Jamison, one of the last to leave the *Florence*, collapsed as he reached the deck. Severely burned, he was carried below to receive first-aid treatment.

Undaunted, Captain Barker shouted terse orders, goading the men to greater activity when the flames showed signs of getting beyond control. After the first contact with the *Florence*, only occasional sparks ignited the *Queen's* decks, but the heat was terrific. Women and children became hysterical, fearful that the ferryboat would become a flaming torch.

"The worst is over now," Sally sighed as she and Penny refilled water buckets. "Pop knows what he's doing. He's saved the waterfront."

"But this ferryboat?"

"It still may go up in smoke, but I don't think so," Sally replied calmly. "Pop is heading so that the wind will carry the flames away from us. He'll beach the *Florence* on Horseshoe shoal and let the wreck burn to the water's edge."

For the next fifteen minutes, there was no lessening of worry aboard the *River Queen*. The ferryboat clung grimly to the blazing excursion boat, losing contact at times, then picking her up again, and pushing on toward the shoal.

Fire fighting activities aboard the ferryboat became better organized; the passengers, observing that Captain Barker knew what he was about, became calm and easily managed. By the time fire boats arrived to spray the *Florence* with streams of pressured water, the situation was well in hand.

Collapsing on the deck from sheer exhaustion, Penny and Sally gazed toward the warehouses and docks on the opposite shore. Only one fire of any size was visible there.

"The fire boats will quickly put it out," Sally said confidently. "But I hate to think what would have happened if the wind and current had driven the *Florence* along those wharves."

Penny wiped her cheek and saw that her hand was covered with black soot. Sally too was a sight. She had ripped the hem from her skirt, her hair was an untidy mess, everything about her was pungent with smoke.

"Where were we when all this excitement started?" Penny asked presently. "If my memory serves me correctly, we had sent out a police call for Claude Harper and his pals to be arrested. It all seems vague

in my mind, as if it occurred a million years ago."

"Why, I had forgotten too!" Sally gasped. "I hope the police went there and caught those men before they made a get-away."

Scrambling to their feet, the girls moved to the starboard side of the *Queen* which permitted a view of the Harper house far upriver. They were startled and dismayed to see tongues of flame shooting from a window.

"That place has caught on fire too!" Sally exclaimed, then corrected herself. "But sparks from the *Florence* never could have been carried so far!"

"The house has been set afire on purpose!" Penny cried. "Oh, Sally, don't you see? It's a trick to destroy all the evidence hidden there! The Harpers intend to skip town tonight, and they're taking advantage of this fire to make it appear that destruction of the house is accidental!"

CHAPTER

23

FIRE!

SICK AT heart, the two girls realized with the Harper house aflame, their last chance of proving the guilt of the brass thieves might be gone. As they stood at the railing of the *Queen*, gloomily watching the spreading, creeping line of fire, a motorboat chugged up.

"Ahoy!" shouted a familiar voice. "Can you take aboard three more survivors? They're the very last we can find on the river."

"It's Jack!" Penny cried, recognizing his voice though unable to see his face in the dark. "After we get the passengers aboard, perhaps he'll take us upriver to the Harpers!"

The girls ran to help with the new arrivals, but sailors already had lifted them from the boat and carried them aboard the *Queen*.

"This is my last load," Jack called out. "Nearly everyone was saved. Coast Guard boats are patrol-

ling now, and if there are other survivors, they'll be taken ashore."

"Jack!" Penny called down to him.

"That you, Penny?" he demanded in astonishment. "Why didn't you come back to Shadow Island this afternoon? We've all been worried about you!"

"It's a long story, and there's no time to tell it now! Jack, will you take us to the Harpers' in your motor-boat?"

"Now?"

"Yes, the house is on fire."

Helping the girls into the boat, Jack turned to gaze upstream. "That's strange!" he exclaimed. "How could sparks from the *Florence* have carried so far?"

"The answer is, they didn't," Penny said grimly. "The house was set afire on purpose. Just get us to the pier as quickly as you can."

Somewhere along the shore a big city clock struck the hour of midnight. The young people did not notice. As the boat raced over the water, bouncing as it struck each high wave, they discussed what had happened just prior to the outbreak of fire aboard the *Florence*.

"I know part of the stolen brass was dumped into the river by Sweeper Joe," Penny revealed excitedly. "The remainder was locked in the basement of the Harper house the last I knew. And I'm satisfied the brass lantern taken from the *Queen* by Adam Glower-

shick is among the loot. All the thieves expect to skip town tonight. Probably they're gone by this time."

Beaching the boat some distance from the burning house, the three young people ran up the slope. Firemen had not yet reached the scene, and the few persons who had gathered, were watching the flames but making no effort to battle them.

"It's a hopeless proposition," Jack commented. "This far from the city, there's no water pressure. The house will burn to the ground."

"And all the evidence with it," Penny added gloomily. "What miserable luck!"

No boats were tied up at the dock, nor was there any sign of the Harpers or their friends in the crowd. Obviously, the entire party had fled.

"Isn't there some place where we can telephone the police?" Penny suggested impatiently. "If they act quickly, these men still may be caught. They can't be very far away."

"The nearest house is up the beach about an eighth of a mile," Jack informed. "Maybe we can telephone from there."

"You two go," Sally said casually. "I want to stay here."

At the moment, Jack and Penny, intent only upon their mission, thought nothing about the remark. Following the paved road which made walking easy, they hastened as fast as they could.

"Jack," Penny said, puffing to keep pace with him. "There's something I want to ask you."

"Shoot!"

"Why have you felt so friendly toward that crook, Glowershick?"

Jack's eyebrows jerked upward and he gave a snort of disgust. "Whatever gave you that crazy idea?"

"Well, he came to the island, and you borrowed money from me to give him—"

"So you recognized him that day?"

"Yes," Penny answered quietly. "You tried to hide his identity, so I said nothing more. I kept thinking you would explain."

"I'm prepared to pay you what I owe, Penny."

"Oh, Jack, it's not the money. Don't you understand—"

"You think I've had a finger in lifting the brass lantern from the *Queen*," Jack said stiffly.

"Gracious, no! But shouldn't you explain?"

Jack was silent for a moment. Then he said, "Thanks, Penny, for having a little faith in me. I know I've been an awful sap."

"Suppose you tell me all about it."

"There's nothing to tell. I went to the Harpers a number of times—attended their dances, and spent a lot of money. I got into debt to that fellow Glowershick and he pressed me for it."

"There was nothing more to it?"

"Not a thing, except that I didn't want my folks to hear about it. That's why I pretended I didn't know Glowershick. I was afraid you would tell them. Don't you believe me?"

"Oh, I do, Jack. I'm so relieved. And the jitterbug girl at Harpers'—"

"Oh, *her*!" Jack said scornfully. "She was a stupid thing, and I don't see how I stood her silly chatter. Most of the money I borrowed from Glowershick was spent on her. As I've said, I was a complete chump."

Reaching a house some distance back from the river, they found the owner at home, and were given permission to telephone the police. Jack was promised by an inspector that all police cruisers would be ordered to watch for the escaped brass thieves. Railroad terminals, bus depots and all roads leading from the city would be guarded.

"Watch the riverfront too," Jack urged. "The men may have gone by boat to Tate's Beach, intending to catch a train from there."

Satisfied they had done everything possible, Penny and Jack hastened back to the Harpers'. The sky was tinted pink and flames now shot from the roof of the house. A large crowd had gathered, and there was excited talk and gesturing.

"Something's wrong!" Penny observed anxiously.

Pushing through the crowd, they sought vainly to find Sally.

A woman was talking excitedly, pointed toward the flaming building.

"I tell you, I saw a girl run in there only a few minutes ago!" she insisted. "And she didn't come out! She must be in there now!"

The words shocked Penny and Jack as the same thought came to them. Could it be that reckless Sally had ventured into the basement of the house, hoping to recover the brass lantern or other evidence which would incriminate the thieves?

"She acted funny when we left her here," Penny whispered in horror. "Oh, Jack! If she's inside the building—"

Pushing through the crowd, she grasped the arm of the woman who was talking. "Who was the girl? What was she wearing?" she demanded tensely.

"A blue sweater," the woman recalled. "Her hair was flying wild and her face was streaked with dirt as if she'd already been in the fire. I thought maybe she lived here."

"It was Sally," Penny murmured, her heart sinking to her shoe tops. "Why hasn't someone brought her out?"

"No human being could get into that house now," declared a man who stood close by. "The firemen aren't here yet. Anyway, we ain't sure there's anyone inside."

"I saw the girl run in, I tell you!" the woman insisted.

To debate over such a vital matter infuriated Penny and Jack. Sally was nowhere in the crowd and they were convinced she had entered the blazing building. Flames were blowing from some of the lower windows and smoke was dense. It was obvious that no man present was willing to risk his life to ascertain if the girl were inside.

"She must have tried to reach the basement!" Penny cried. "Oh, Jack, we've got to bring her out!"

Nodding grimly, Jack stripped off his coat. Throwing it over his head as a shield, he darted into the burning building. Penny, close at his heels, had no protection.

Inside the house, smoke was so black they could not see three feet ahead. Choking, gasping for breath, they groped their way through the living room to the kitchen. Penny jerked open the door leading into the cellar.

Flames roared into her face. The entire basement was an inferno of heat. No human being could descend the stairs and return. If Sally were below, she was beyond help.

Closing the door, Penny staggered backwards. Her head was spinning and she could not get her breath.

"It's no use!" Jack shouted in her ear. "We've got

to get out of here! The walls or floor may collapse."

Clutching Penny's arm, he pulled her along. In the black smoke swirling about them, they missed the kitchen door.

Frantically, they crept along a scorching hot wall, seeking to find an exit.

Then Penny stumbled over an object on the floor and fell. As she tried to get up, her hand touched something soft and yielding. A body lay sprawled in a heap beside her on the floor.

"It's Sally!" she cried. "Oh, Jack, help me get her up!"

CHAPTER

24

DREDGING THE RIVER

SALLY MOANED softly but did not stir as Penny tried to pull her to a sitting position. The heat now was almost unbearably intense, with flying brands dropping everywhere. But near the floor, the air was better, and Penny drew it in by deep gulps.

Jack's groping hand encountered the sink. Soaking his coat with water from one of the taps, he gave it to Penny to protect her head and shoulders.

"Help me get Sally onto my back in a Fireman's carry," he gasped. "We can make it."

The confidence in Jack's voice gave Penny new courage and strength. As he knelt down on the floor, she dragged Sally onto his back. Holding the inert body high on his shoulders, he staggered across the kitchen.

Penny guided him to the door. Flames had eaten into the living room, and a small portion of the floor

had fallen through. To reach the exit was impossible.

"A window!" Jack directed.

Penny could see none, so dense was the smoke, but she remembered how the room had been laid out, and pulled Jack to an outer wall. Her exploring hand encountered a window sill, but she could not get the sash up.

In desperation, she kicked out the glass. A rush of cool, sweet air struck her face. Filling her lungs, she turned to help Jack with his burden. Before she could grasp him, he sagged slowly to the floor.

Thrusting her head through the broken window, Penny shouted for help.

Willing hands lifted her to safety, and two men climbed through the window to bring out Jack and Sally. Both were carried some distance from the blazing building to an automobile where they were revived.

However, Sally was in need of medical attention. Hair and eyebrows had been singed half away, and more serious, her hands and arms were severely burned. Jack and Penny rode with her to the hospital when the ambulance finally came.

Not until hours later, after Captain Barker had been summoned, did Sally know anyone. Heavily bandaged, with her father, Jack, and Penny at her bedside, she opened her eyes and gave them a half-hearted grin.

"The *Florence*?" she whispered.

"Safely beached on a shoal," Captain Barker assured her tenderly. "There's nothing to worry about. All the passengers have been taken to hospitals or to their homes. A preliminary check has shown only one man lost, an engineer who was trapped at his post when the explosion occurred aboard the *Florence*."

"Pop, you were marvelous," Sally whispered. "You saved the waterfront."

"And nearly lost a daughter. Sally, why did you try to get into that burning building?"

Sally drew a deep, tired sigh.

"Never mind," said Penny kindly. "We know why you went in—it was to find the brass lantern."

Sally nodded. "When I got to the basement, flames were shooting up everywhere," she recalled with a shudder. "I realized then that I couldn't possibly find the lantern or anything else. I tried to get back, but smoke was everywhere. That was the last I remembered."

"It was Jack who saved you," Penny said, but he cut in to insist that the credit belonged to her rather than to him.

In the midst of a good-natured argument over the subject, a nurse came to say that Penny and Jack both were wanted on the telephone.

"The police department calling," she explained.

They were down the hall in a flash to take the call. Captain Brown of the city police force informed them

they were wanted immediately at police headquarters to identify Sweeper Joe, the Harpers, and Clark Clayton who had been arrested at the railroad station. Adam Glowershick also had been taken into custody.

At headquarters fifteen minutes later, the young people found Mr. Gandiss, Penny's father, and Heiney Growski already there. Questioned by police, the young people revealed everything they knew about the case.

"We can hold these men for a while," Chief Bailey promised Mr. Gandiss, "but to make charges stick, we'll have to have more evidence."

Penny had told of the cache of brass in the Harper basement, and also of seeing Sweeper Joe and Clark Clayton dump much of the loot in the river. She was assured that the ruins of the house would be searched in the morning and that a dredge would be assigned to try to locate the brass which had been thrown overboard into the deepest part of the channel.

Heiney Growski produced records he had kept, showing a list of Gandiss factory employees known to be implicated in the plot.

"Most of the persons involved are new employees who smuggled small pieces of brass out of the factory and turned them over to Sweeper Joe for pin money," he revealed. "The leaders are Joe, Clayton, and Glowershick. With them behind bars, the ring will dissolve."

"There's one thing I want to know," Penny declared feelingly. "Who planted the brass in Sally's locker while she was working at the factory?"

No one could answer the question at the moment, but the following day, after police had repeatedly questioned the prisoners, the entire story became known. Sweeper Joe, the real instigator of the plot, had slipped into the locker room himself, and had placed the incriminating piece of evidence in Sally's locker, using a master key. He had disliked her because several times she had resented his attempts to become friendly.

Although police had obtained signed confessions, tangible evidence also was needed, for as Chief Bailey pointed out to Mr. Gandiss, the men might repudiate their statements when they appeared in court. Accordingly, police squads were sent to the Harpers' to search the ashes for evidence, and also to the river to supervise dredging operations.

Throughout the day, between trips to the hospital to see Sally, Jack and Penny watched the dredge boat make its trips back and forth over the area where the loot had been dropped.

"I hope I wasn't mistaken in the location," Penny remarked anxiously as the vessel made repeated excursions without success. "After all, the night was dark, and I had no way of taking accurate bearings."

Across the river and barely visible, the blackened,

smoking skeleton of the *Florence* lay stranded on a sandbar. Throughout the night, a fireboat had steadily pumped water into the burning vessel, but even so, fires had not been entirely extinguished.

Morning papers had carried the encouraging information that there was only one known casualty as a result of the disaster. That many lives had not been lost was credited entirely to the courageous action of Captain Barker.

Becoming weary of watching the monotonous dredging operations, Jack and Penny joined a throng of curious bystanders at the Harper property. Police had taken complete charge and were raking the smoldering ruins.

"Find anything?" Jack asked a policeman he knew.

The man pointed to a small heap of charred metal which had been taken from the basement. There were many pieces of brass, but the missing lantern was not to be found in the pile.

However, from a member of the arson squad, they learned that enough evidence had been found to prove conclusively that the fire had been started with gasoline.

"Ma Harper spilled the whole story," one of the policemen related. "She and her husband were fairly straight until they became mixed up with Sweeper Joe, who has a police record of long standing. Ma had a black market business in silk stockings that

didn't amount to much. So far as we've been able to learn, she and a taxi driver whom we've caught, were the only ones involved. Her husband and the other men considered the stocking racket small potatoes for them."

After talking with the policemen for awhile, the young people wandered down to the river's edge to see how dredging operations progressed.

"They're hauling something out of the water now!" Jack exclaimed. "By George! It looks like brass to me!"

Finding a boat tied up at the dock, they borrowed it and rowed rapidly out to the dredge. There they saw that some of the metal which Sweeper Joe had dumped, had indeed been recovered.

Prodding in the muddy pile in the bottom of the dredge net, Penny uttered a little scream of joy. "The brass lantern is here, Jack! What wonderful luck!"

Seizing the slime-covered object, she washed it in the river. "Let's take it straight to Sally at the hospital!" she urged.

Because the lantern would be important evidence in the case against Glowershick, police aboard the dredge were unwilling for it to be removed. However, the young people carried the news to Sally.

"Oh, I'm so glad the lantern has been recovered!" she cried happily. "Jack, you'll win it in the race Friday."

Jack and Penny exchanged a quick, stricken glance. Temporarily, they had forgotten the race and all it meant to Sally. With her hands bandaged from painful burns, she never would be able to compete.

"We'll postpone the race," Jack said gruffly. "It would be no competition if we held it without you."

"Nonsense," replied Sally. "It will be weeks before I can use my hands well, so it would be stupid to postpone the race that long. Fortunately, the doctor says I may leave the hospital tomorrow, and I'll not be scarred."

"If you can't race, I won't either," declared Jack stubbornly.

"Jack, you must!" Agitated, Sally raised herself on an elbow. "I'd feel dreadful if you didn't compete. The race has meant everything to you."

"Not any more. Winning doesn't seem important now. I'll not sail in the race unless the *Cat's Paw* is entered, and that's final!"

"Oh, Jack, you're such an old mule!" Sally tossed her head impatiently on the pillow. Then she grinned.

"If my *Cat* is in the race, you'll sail?"

"Sure," he agreed, suspecting no trick.

Sally laughed gleefully. "Then it's settled! Penny will represent me in the race!"

"I'll do what?" demanded Penny.

"You'll skipper the boat in my stead!"

"But I lack experience."

"You'll win the trophy easily," chuckled Sally. "Why, the *Cat's Paw* is by far the fastest boat on the river."

"Says who?" demanded Jack, but without his old fire.

"But I couldn't race alone," said Penny, decidedly worried. "Sally, would you be able to ride along as adviser and captain bold?"

"I certainly would jump at the chance if the doctor would give permission. Oh, Penny, if only he would!"

"The race isn't until Friday," Jack said encouragingly. "You can make it, Sally."

The girl pulled herself to a sitting posture, staring at her bandaged hands.

"Yes, I can," she agreed with quiet finality. "Why, I feel better already. Even if I have to be carried to the dock in a wheel chair, I'll be in that race!"

THE RACE

A MID-AFTERNOON sun beat down upon the wharves as a group of sailboats tacked slowly toward the starting line for the annual Hat Island trophy race. The shores were lined with spectators, and from the clubhouse where a band played, music carried over the water.

At the tiller of the *Cat's Paw*, Penny, in white blouse and slacks, hair bound tightly to keep it from blowing, sat nervous and tense. Sally, lounging on a cushion in the bow, seemed thoroughly relaxed. Though her arms remained in bandages, otherwise she had completely recovered from her unpleasant experience.

"Isn't the wind dying?" Penny asked anxiously. "Oh, Sally, I was hoping we'd have a good stiff breeze for the race! Handicapped as we are—"

"We're not handicapped," Sally corrected. "Of course, I can't handle the ropes or do much to help,

but we have a wonderful boat that will prove more than a match for Jack's *Spindrift*."

"You're only saying that to give me confidence."

"No, I'm not," Sally denied, turning to study the group of racing boats. "We'll win the trophy! Just wait and see."

"If we do, it will be because of your brain and my brawn," Penny chuckled. "I'll admit I'm scared silly. I never was in an important race before."

Conversation ceased, for the boats now were bunching close to the starting line, maneuvering for position. Jack drifted by in the *Spindrift*, raising his hand in friendly greeting. As he passed, he actually glanced anxiously toward Sally, as if worried lest the girl overtax herself.

"I hope he doesn't try to throw the race just to be gallant," Penny thought. "But I don't believe he will, for then the victory would be a hollow one."

The change apparent in Jack so amazed Penny that she had to pinch herself to realize it was true. Since the night of the fire, he had visited Sally every day. In a brief span of hours, he had grown from a selfish, arrogant youth into a steady, dependable man. And it now was evident to everyone that he liked Sally in more than a friendly way.

"Better come about now, Penny," Sally broke in upon her thoughts. "Head for the starting line. The signal should be given any minute now."

The boats started in a close, tight group. Jack was over the line first, but with *Cat's Paw* directly behind.

In the first leg of the race, the two boats kept fairly even, with the others lagging. As the initial marker was rounded, there was a noticeable fall-off in the wind.

"It's going to be a drifting race," Sally confirmed, raising troubled eyes to the wrinkled sail. "We're barely drawing now and Jack's boat has the edge in a calm."

The *Spindrift* skimmed merrily along, now in the lead by many yards. Though Penny held the tiller delicately, taking advantage of every breath of wind, the distance between the two boats rapidly increased.

"We're out of it," she sighed. "We can't hope to overtake Jack now."

Sally nodded gloomily. Shading her eyes against the glare of the sun, she gazed across the river, studying the triangular course. Far off-shore, well beyond the line the *Spindrift* and their own boat was taking, the surface of the water appeared rippled. Ahead of them there was only a smooth surface.

"Penny," she said quietly. "I believe there's more breeze out there."

Penny nodded and headed the *Cat's Paw* on the longer course out into the river. To many spectators ashore it appeared that the girls deliberately had abandoned the race, but aboard the *River Queen*, Captain

Barker grinned proudly at his guests, Mr. Parker, and Mr. and Mrs. Gandiss.

"Those gals are using their heads!" he praised. "Well, Mr. Gandiss, it looks as if the Barkers will keep the trophy another year!"

"The race isn't over yet," Mr. Gandiss rumbled goodnaturedly.

Aboard the *Cat's Paw*, Penny and Sally were none too jubilant. Although sails curved with wind and they were footing much faster than the other boats, the course they had chosen would force them to sail a much longer distance. Could they cross the finish line ahead of the *Spindrift*?

"Shouldn't we turn now?" Penny asked impatiently. "Jack's so much closer than we."

"Not yet," Sally said calmly. "We must make it in one long tack. He will be forced to make several. That's our only chance. If we misjudge the distance, we're sunk."

Tensely, they watched the moving line of boats close along shore. The *Spindrift* seemed almost at the finish line, though her sails barely were drawing and she moved through the water at a snail's pace.

Again Penny glanced anxiously at her companion.

"Now!" Sally gave the signal.

Instantly Penny swung the *Cat's Paw* onto the homeward tack. Every inch of her sails drawing, she swept toward the finish line.

"We're so much farther away than the *Spindrift*," Penny groaned, crouching low so that her body would not deflect the wind. "Oh, Sally, will we make it?"

"Can't tell yet. It will be nip and tuck. But if we can keep this breeze—"

The wind held, and the *Cat's Paw*, sailing to windward of the finish line, moved along faster and faster. On the other hand, the *Spindrift* was forced to make several short tacks, losing distance each time. The boats drew even.

Suddenly Sally relaxed, and slumped down on the cushions.

"Just hold the old girl steady on her course," she grinned. "That brass lantern is the same as ours!"

"Then we'll win?"

"We can't lose now unless some disaster should overtake us."

Even as Sally spoke, boat whistles began to toot. Sailing experts nodded their heads in a pleased way, for it was a race to their liking.

A minute later, sweeping in like a house afire, the *Cat's Paw* crossed the finish line well in advance of the *Spindrift*. Jack's boat placed second with other craft far behind.

Friendly hands assisted the girls ashore where they were spirited away to the clubhouse for rest and refreshments. As everyone crowded about to congratulate them upon victory, Jack joined the throng.

"It was a dandy race," he said with sincerity. "I tried hard to win, but you outsmarted me."

"Why, Jack!" teased Sally. "Imagine admitting a thing like that!"

"Now don't try to rub it in," he pleaded. "I know I've been an awful heel. You probably won't believe me, but I'm sorry about the way I acted—"

"For goodness sakes, don't apologize," Sally cut him short. "I enjoyed every one of those squabbles we had. I hope we have a lot more of them."

"We probably will," Jack warned, "because I expect to be underfoot quite a bit of the time."

Later in the afternoon, the brass lantern which had been turned over to the club by the police, was formally presented to Sally. She was warned however, that the trophy would have to be returned later for use in court as evidence against Adam Glowershick.

The nicest surprise of all was yet to come. Captain Barker was requested by a committee chairman to kindly step forward into full view of the spectators.

"Now what's this?" he rumbled, edging away.

But he could not escape. Speaking into a loud-speaker, the committee chairman informed the captain and delighted spectators, that in appreciation of what he had done to save the waterfront, a thousand dollar purse had been raised. Mr. Gandiss, whose factory certainly would have faced destruction had wharves caught fire, had contributed half the sum himself.

"Why, beaching the *Florence* was nothing," the captain protested, deeply embarrassed. "I can repair the damage done to the *Queen* with less than a hundred dollars."

"The money is yours, and you must keep it," he was told. "You must have a use for it."

"I have that," Captain Barker admitted, winking at his daughter. "There's a certain young lady of my acquaintance who has been hankerin' to go away to college."

"Oh, Pop." Sally's eyes danced. "How wonderful! I know where I want to go too!"

"So you've been studying the school catalogues?" her father teased.

Sally shook her head. Reaching for Penny's hand, she drew her close.

"I don't need a catalogue," she laughed. "I only know I'm scheduled for the same place Penny selects! She's been my good luck star, and I'll set my future course by her!"